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AUTHOR Patrick, John J.
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ABSTRACT

Central questions in the 1980s social studies curriculum reform literature concern selection, organization, and presentation of academic subject materials to elementary and secondary school students. This paper reviews general curriculum and comprehensive social studies reform literature of this period and explores the 1987 Bradley Commission report, "Building a History Curriculum," in terms of: (1) how the report fits the themes and tone of social studies reform literature; (2) the compatibility of the report's support of history as the core of the social studies curriculum with other reports that advocate geography, economics, civics, or international studies as curriculum cores; and (3) the commission's views about history in relation to other social studies curriculum trends. Various practical and possible areas of curriculum reform are described, and the paper concludes that the greatest value of the 1980s social studies curriculum reform reports has been stimulation and public discussion about teaching and learning in schools. Extensive end notes are provided.(JHP)

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by
John J. Patrick
Director, Social Studies Development Center
Indiana University

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The 1980s have been years of serious concern about the contents of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. The central questions in the 1980s curriculum reform literature have been about selection, organization, and presentation of academic subject matter to all students as part of their general education for citizenship. The 1988 Bradley Commission report, Building a History Curriculum, is one of the recent contributions to this genre of educational literature.[1]

Secretary of Education T.H. Bell started it in 1981 with the creation of his National Commission on Excellence in Education, which issued its provocative report, A Nation at Risk, in April 1983.[2] Several other reports followed in the same vein; each one restated, reinforced, and extended the original message about the imperative for reform of the curriculum.[3]

The reports were filled with bad news, such as low and steadily declining levels of student achievement in basic subjects (sciences, mathematics, literature, languages, and social studies, including history) and in processes and skills (reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning). The reports also raised hopes about how to improve teaching and

learning of basic subjects in schools.

A main theme of the reports has been the need to establish a core curriculum, knowledge and skills that all students should be expected to learn. For example, in a 1983 report on high schools Ernest Boyer said, "A core of common learning is essential. The basic curriculum should be a study of those consequential ideas, experiences, and traditions common to all of us...."[4]

Near the end of the 1980s, common learning was still a prominent part of the educational reform literature, as exemplified in a curriculum report by William J. Bennett: "We want our students--whatever their plans for the future--to take from high school a shared body of knowledge and skills, a common language of ideas, a common moral and intellectual discipline."[5]

In addition to the comprehensive curriculum reform reports, such as those by Boyer and Bennett, there have been important 1980s reports on particular subjects, including the subjects of the social studies: (a) geography in 1984 and 1988,[6] (b) economics in 1984 and 1988,[7] (c) history in 1987 and 1988,[8] (d) international studies in 1988 and 1989.[9] These reports have made strong and sometimes conflicting claims for different social studies subjects as essentials of the core curriculum. (The term social studies is used here as it is used in most schools,

as a departmental label for history and the social sciences.)

The next major entry into the parade of social studies curriculum reform reports will deal with civics in the schools. A new project on civic education, CIVITAS, was established in 1988 and will issue a report in 1990 that is likely to make a strong case for civics as the central element of the social studies curriculum in elementary and secondary schools.[10]

The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, organized in 1987, is an outgrowth of the 1980s curriculum reform movement and reflects its heavy emphasis on common learning experiences and academic rigor. Full comprehension and practical utilization of the Bradley Commission's report, Building A History Curriculum, are not likely to be achieved without knowledge of its relationships to the major reports in the 1980s curriculum reform literature and of the trends in social studies education that this literature has influenced.

The following questions are posed to frame discussion and enhance understanding of the Bradley Commission's recommendations in relationship to the social studies curriculum reform reports and trends of the 1980s:

1. To what extent does the Bradley Commission report, Building a History Curriculum, fit the themes and tone of the 1980s social studies reform literature?

2. Are the recommendations of the Bradley Commission in support of history compatible with claims on the core curriculum advanced in major reports by advocates of other subjects in the social studies: geography, economics, civics, and international studies?
3. Are the Bradley Commission's views about history in the schools in line with emerging curriculum trends in the social studies?

The Bradley Commission report strongly supports the academic core curriculum theme in the 1980s educational reform literature. The following general recommendations are made about history in the core curriculum:[11]

- o All students in elementary and secondary schools should be required to study history;
- o The social studies curriculum in kindergarten through grade six should be centered in history.
- o The social studies curriculum in grades seven through twelve should include no less than four years of required courses in history.
- o All students in elementary and secondary schools should be required to study American history, the history of Western civilization, and world history.

These recommendations about history in the secondary school

core of common learning are in agreement with the comprehensive curriculum reform reports of the 1980s, which tend to recommend at least three required years of social studies in the four years of high school, with a heavy emphasis on history.

Boyer's model high school curriculum, for example, calls for one year's study of Western civilization, one year of American history, and one semester's study of a non-Western nation. In addition, Boyer would have all students complete a one-year course in American government.[12]

Bennett's model high school curriculum would require all students to complete two years of history: a general history of Western civilization in the ninth grade and a general history of the United States in the tenth grade. In addition, he would have all students complete a one-semester course in "Principles of American Democracy" and a one-semester course in "American Democracy and the World."[13]

The Education for Democracy Project calls for courses in the history of the United States, Western civilization, and one non-Western civilization. Courses in world geography and American government are also proposed as part of the secondary school core curriculum.[14]

The Bradley Commission agrees with recommendations in preceding curriculum reports about placing history in the

center of the elementary and middle school social studies curriculum.[15] The Bradley Commission and others claim that history has practically disappeared from the curriculum in grades K-3 and has declined seriously in quantity and quality in grades 4-7. This decline of history in the elementary schools and middle schools is associated with the "expanding environments" framework, which has dominated the K-7 social studies curriculum since the 1930s.[16] Both the Bradley Commission and Bennett, among others, contend that there is no research-based justification for delaying the teaching and learning of history until students have entered secondary school.[17]

The Bradley Commission report reflects a general concern in the curriculum reform literature about the scanty and incoherent treatment in the curriculum of Western civilization and world history. Less than one-third of the fifty states have a world history or Western civilization requirement for graduation from high school.[18] Inadequacies in the teaching and learning of world history and Western civilization have been documented and decried during the 1980s by the Education for Democracy Project, the National Assessment for Educational Progress, the National Governors' Association, and the American Forum. They stress the need to infuse the curriculum with realistic and substantial studies of people and places around the world in the past and present.[19]

The Bradley Commission agrees with other 1980s curriculum reformers in its concern for coherence and connections in the curriculum and draws attention to the problem of making meaningful connections between the parts of a history course and between one history course and another at different grade levels. The study of American history, for example, should be clearly connected to studies of Western civilization and world history.[20]

These subject matter linkages are critical conditions of effective teaching and learning because knowledge presented discretely, as isolated ideas or bits of information, has limited utility for learners. By contrast, meaningful integration of knowledge greatly contributes to comprehension, retention, and transfer of learning in school from one course to other related courses.

In its laudatory emphasis on the quality and quantity of history in a coherent core curriculum, the Bradley Commission raises, perhaps inadvertently, a serious problem of curriculum reform. Curriculum space is finite; indeed, the limits are too strict and the places too few to permit anything approaching accomodation of the various claims on the core curriculum made in the 1980s reform literature by advocates of different subjects in the social studies: history, geography, economics, civics/government, and

international studies. Thus there is no way that the Bradley Commission's proposal of four years of history in grades 7-12 can be implemented concurrently with proposed new courses in geography, economics, international studies, and civics. Likewise, history's claim on the center of the social studies curriculum in grades K-6 is faced with counter-claims by geography, economics, international studies, and civics.

Consider the following claims for limited core curriculum space that have been proposed in various 1980s curriculum reform reports by proponents of different subjects in the social studies.

According to the Joint Committee on Geographic Education, "geographic literacy" is an indispensable part of every student's general education for citizenship; thus georgraphy "belongs in every grade level of the curriculum. Ideally it should be a separate school subject."[21] However, many geographic educators would be satisfied by the teaching of geography in high school history courses and in multi-disciplinary courses in grades K-7.[22]

According to the Joint Council on Economic Education, "economic literacy" should be a primary goal of the social studies curriculum, which can only be achieved by including economics at every grade level in the K-7 social studies curriculum. In addition, the Joint Council says that all secondary school students should be required to complete a

one-semester course in economics.[23]

Several prominent agencies, such as the National Governors' Association and the American Forum, have voiced alarms about the poor quality of international education in our elementary and secondary schools. They insist that all students, starting from the earliest grades and continuing through high school, must learn about the various cultures of our contemporary world and the relationships of the United States to them as part of a global community.[24] The Task Force on International Education of the National Governors' Association proposes that elementary and secondary schools should "incorporate an international focus in the entire curriculum."[25]

Finally, every curriculum reform report in the social studies acknowledges the central civic purpose of the schools. However, no one is more emphatic about it than R. Freeman Butts, a leader of CIVITAS, the recently-launched civics curriculum framework project. In his latest book on the curriculum, Butts "argues for revitalizing the historic civic mission of American education. This means explicit and continuing study of the basic concepts and values underlying our democratic political community and constitutional order. The common core of the curriculum throughout school and college years should be the morality of citizenship."[26]

What are the proponents of history as the central

subject in the social studies to make of these conflicting claims on the core curriculum of schools? It is impossible to implement all of the Bradley Commission recommendations about the core curriculum in concert with all of the proposals in behalf of geography, economics, international studies, and civics.

There is not room in the secondary school curriculum (grades 7-12) for four years of history plus one year of geography plus one semester (at least) of economics plus one semester (at least) of civics/government plus one or more courses in international relations or global studies. Curriculum reformers must also recognize that very few school districts in the United States require more than three years of social studies for graduation from high school, and many require less than three years.[27] The reason is strong pressure to save space in the core curriculum for English, mathematics, sciences, foreign languages, and the fine arts.

These crowded curriculum conditions raise tough questions. Is it practical to recommend more than five years of social studies in the six-year span from grade seven through grade twelve? Is it realistic to expect that four of these five years of social studies will be given to the study of history?

A firm rule of practical curriculum reform is that every proposal for adding content to the curriculum must be

coupled with a proposal for deleting an equivalent amount of content. Indeed, the success of recommendations for curriculum changes often hinges on the credibility and practicality of the case made for adding and subtracting subjects and topics. However, the problem of what to take out of the curriculum to make room for the new content tends to be ignored in the 1980s social studies curriculum reform literature. One very important exception is the recommendation to replace the "expanding environments" framework of grades K-7 with a curriculum centered in history and geography.

One solution to the problem of conflicting claims on limited spaces in the curriculum is to seek workable ways to interrelate subjects. Several curriculum reports, including the Bradley Commission report, urge the teaching of geography in secondary school courses on American history, world history, Western civilization. They would also blend content in history, geography, and civics in the center of the elementary social studies curriculum.[28]

The Education for Democracy project proposes "a reordering of the curriculum around a core of history and geography.... Around this core of history and geography, students should be introduced to the added perspectives offered by economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science."[29] Courses in American history and world history are also seen as vehicles for civic

education, for teaching about the development of democratic institutions and values.[30] These ideas are very compatible with the Bradley Commission report.

Concerns about international education can be addressed through improvements in the quality and quantity of world geography and world history in the core curriculum. However, many proponents of global studies in the curriculum, more interested in current events than history, would not be satisfied by these remedies.[31]

Certainly, the major curriculum reform reports have been disappointing to advocates of economics in education for citizenship. In general, the reports have overlooked the case for substantial treatment of economics, which has been persuasively put forward by the Joint Council for Economic Education.[32]

Conflicts about content priorities, about what to subtract from or add to the limited space in the core curriculum, are not likely to be resolved in the near future. Contention will continue about what content is of most worth in general education for citizenship.

Emerging curriculum trends seem to offer some encouragement to social studies educators who support prominent recommendations of the 1980s curriculum reform literature, including the Bradley Commission report.

However, the trends are mixed and suggest difficult challenges ahead for educators who would greatly expand history requirements in secondary schools.

The good news is that there has been a general increase in the quantity of social studies courses required for graduation. From 1980 to the beginning of 1989, high school graduation requirements in social studies were increased in 32 of the 50 states. In 25 states, the requirement for graduation is 3 years; it is 3.5 years in 2 states; and it is 4 years in 3 states. However, twenty states require less than three years of social studies in the high school core curriculum.[33]

It is unlikely that the social studies requirement will be increased beyond three years in most school districts. So most curriculum planners face rather strict limits on the number of history courses that they can include in the high school core curriculum.

At present, thirty states require only one course in history as a condition for graduation from high school, and four states have no history requirement. Only sixteen states require all students to complete two years of history in high school.[34] There obviously is a great difference between these curriculum patterns in secondary schools and the Bradley Commission's proposal of four years of history in the six-year span from grade seven through grade twelve.

One promising avenue for reform in harmony with the Bradley Commission is improvement of the quality of courses that are offered through pressures for improved textbooks and other learning materials. There are indications that most states and school districts are interested in improving their criteria and procedures for selecting textbooks and supplementary materials.[35]

The quality of history courses is also likely to be improved by the growing inclination of curriculum planners to infuse main themes of geographic education into required secondary school history courses. A recent survey commissioned by the Council of Chief State School Officers reveals that "geography is being presented in an integrated fashion with other disciplines. Equally clear is that the most extensive integration of geography with another field is in the subject of history."[36]

Many school districts are moving to replace the typical seventh-grade culture area studies courses with a solid course in either world geography or history or a course that combines world history and geography. There are signs that this type of middle school curriculum change will take hold during the 1990s.[37] Furthermore, interest is growing in the infusion of geographic content into the American history course that is commonly required at the eighth grade.[38]

However, in most school districts where geography is

taught in history courses, the proportion of geographic content may not be sufficient. The geographic subject matter included in these secondary school history courses tends to be less than 25 percent of the course content, and often it is less than 10 percent.[39]

The elementary social studies curriculum seems most ripe for changes in line with the 1980s curriculum reform movement. Sharp criticisms of the "expanding environments" framework in curriculum reform reports and journals have stimulated growing discontent with this long-standing curiculum pattern, and elementary school educators seem open to changes.

The California Department of Education became a leader in this area of curriculum reform with publication in 1988 of a history/geography-centered curriculum framework as an alternative to the traditional elementary social studies curriculum.[40] This California framework is included in the Bradley Commission report as one of three alternative curriculum patterns it recommends to elementary school educators.[41]

The California Framework also includes a high school curriculum plan, but the recommendations for grades K-6 are more likely to influence changes in the short run because of the wide-spread desire to find a workable alternative to the "expanding environments" framework.[42] Other states may not exactly follow the California framework for

elementary social studies, but they are likely to be influenced by it to depart significantly, one way or another, from the traditional "expanding environments" curriculum.

Perhaps the greatest value of the 1980s social studies curriculum reform reports is stimulation of thought and public discussion about teaching and learning in schools. The Bradley Commission report, for example, will start and sustain valuable arguments about the ends and means of education in the social studies. Questions raised by this curriculum reform report should command our attention.

Are the Bradley Commission's recommendations a desirable response to questions about what should be learned by all students through the social studies? Or are these recommendations really suitable for academically-able students, but not for the others?

Is the Bradley Commission's emphasis on common learning in a core curriculum inappropriate for a pluralistic democracy? Or is a widely-implemented core curriculum the key to meaningful civic and social unity within the diversity of our pluralistic society?

Are the Bradley Commission recommendations for a history-centered curriculum practical or realistic in view of the counter-claims on the curriculum advanced by the

advocates of various other subjects in the social studies? Will these recommendations have to be scaled back to more fully accomodate other subjects in the curriculum?

These kinds of questions represent basic challenges for social studies educators in their never-ending quest to improve teaching and learning in schools.[43]

Notes

1. The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, Building A History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools (Washington, DC: Educational Excellence Network, 1988).

2. National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

3. The themes in comprehensive curriculum reform reports of the 1980s are represented by these examples: Ernest L. Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); John Goodlad, A Place Called School (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983); Theodore Sizer, Horace's Compromise (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Making the Grade (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1984); Research and Policy Committee, Investing in Our Children: Business and the Public Schools

(New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1985); William J. Bennett, First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1986); William J. Bennett, James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

4. Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America, 302.

5. Bennett, James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students, 4.

6. The National Council for Geographic Education, Association of American Geographers, and National Geographic Society have promoted reform in the teaching and learning of geography in elementary and secondary schools. They have jointly supported curriculum recommendations in the following report: Joint Committee on Geographic Education, Guidelines for Geographic Education (Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers and the National Council for Geographic Education, 1984); Geography Education Program, Geography: Making Sense of Where We Are (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1988).

7. The Joint Council on Economic Education of New York City has been a persistent advocate of economics in general education for citizenship and as part of the core curriculum of schools. See Phillip Saunders et al., A Framework for Teaching the Basic Concepts (New York: Joint

Council on Economic Education, 1984) and William B. Walstad and John C. Soper, A Report Card on the Economic Literacy of U.S. High School Students (New York: Joint Council on Economic Education, 1988).

8. The 1980s curriculum reform literature has been filled with discussion about improving the teaching and learning of history in elementary and secondary schools. Examples of major curriculum reports are Lynne V. Cheney, American Memory (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1987); Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); Paul Gagnon, Democracy's Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 1987); Bradley Commission on History in Schools, Building A History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools (Washington, DC: The Educational Excellence Network, 1988).

9. Concerns about the need for international studies or global studies in the core curriculum have been expressed in two major reports: Study Commission on Global Education, The United States Prepares for Its Future: Global Perspectives in Education (New York: The American Forum, 1988) and Task Force on International Education, America in Transition: The International Frontier (Washington, DC: National Govrnors' Association, 1989).

10. CIVITAS, a curriculum framework project in civics, is

conducted by the Center for Civic Education; information about CIVITAS may be acquired by contacting Charles N. Quigley, director, 515 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, California 90302. Preliminary reports suggest that this project will strongly emphasize civics in the core curriculum at all levels of education.

11. Bradley Commission, Building A History Curriculum, 7-8.

12. Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America, 100-106.

13. Bennett, James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students, 19-21.

14. Education for Democracy Project, Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 1987), 20.

15. William J. Bennett, First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1986), 29; in addition, see Bennett's last report as U.S. Secretary of Education, James Madison Elementary School (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1988).

16. Bennett, First Lessons, 28-32; the research literature supports the position of Bennett and the Bradley Commission (see Matthew Downey and Linda Levstik, "Teaching and Learning History: The Research Base," Social Education, 52 (September 1988), 336-342).

17. Documentation of the decline of history in elementary schools is provided by Diane Ravitch, "Tot Sociology: Or What Happened to History in the Grade Schools," The American Scholar, 56 (Summer 1987), 343-354; Ravitch argues that research does not support the assumptions advanced in support of the "expanding environments" curriculum.

18. Downey and Levstik, "Teaching and Learning History: The Research Base," Social Education, 336 and Council of State Social Studies Specialists, National Survey: Social Studies Education, Kindergarten-Grade 12 (Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, 1986).

19. Paul Gagnon, Democracy's Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect, 13-24; Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr. What Do Our Seventeen-Year-Olds Know?, 207-208; Task Force on International Education, America in Transition: The International Frontier; Study Commission on Global Education, The United States Prepares for Its Future: Global Perspectives in Education.

20. Boyer, High School, 94-137.

21. Joint Council on Geographic Education, Guidelines for Geographic Education, 9.

22. Ibid.

23. Walstad and Soper, A Report Card on the Economic Literacy of U.S. High School Students, 7-8.

24. Task Force on International Education, America in Transition: The International Frontier, 21-23.

25. Ibid., 21.

26. R. Freeman Butts, The Morality of Democratic Citizenship: Goals for Civic Education in the Republic's Third Century (Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 1988), 184.

27. William H. Clune, The Implementation and Effects of High School Graduation Requirements: First Steps Toward Curricular Reform (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education of Rutgers University, 1989), 49-61.

28. Bennett, James Madison High School, 19-21; Ravitch and Finn, What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?, 209-210; Bennett, First Lessons , 28-34; Bradley Commission, Building A History Curriculum, 9-19.

29. Education for Democracy Project, Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles, 20.

30. Ibid., 17-21.

31. John O'Neil, "Global Education," ASCD Curriculum Update, 29 (January 1989), 1-5.

32. Walstad and Soper, A Report Card on the Economic Literacy of U.S. High School Students.

33. Clune, The Implementation and Effects of High School Graduation Requirements, 49-61.

34. Council of State Social Studies Specialists. National Survey: Social Studies Education; Robert Rothman, "History Instruction is 'In Crisis' Panel Says," Education Week (5 October 1988), 7.

35. Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco (Washington, DC: Council for Basic Education, 1988), 94-96.

36. Duncan MacDonald and Fred Czarra, Geography Education and the States: A Report on a 1988 Geography Education Survey of State Education Agencies (Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988), 9.

37. Ibid., 6-9.

38. Alan Backler, Teaching Geography in American History (Bloomington, IN: Social Studies Development Center in association with the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1988), 1-5.

39. MacDonald and Czarra, Geography Education and the States, 7.

40. History-Social Science Curriculum Framework and Criteria Committee, History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1988), 28-75.

41. Bradley Commission on History in Schools, Building A History Curriculum, 16-18.

42. John O'Neil, "California Frmework a Boon for History Advocates," ASCD Curriculum Update, 30 (January 1988), 1-2; Francie Alexander and Charlotte Crabtree, "California's New History-Social Science Framework Promises Richness and Depth," Educational Leadership, 46 (September 1988), 10-13;

History Matters: Ideas, News, and Notes About History, 1 (February 1989), 4-5.

43. Perhaps the last and largest 1980s curriculum study project in the social studies might offer enlightening responses to the critical questions raised by the Bradley Commission report. In 1987, the National Council for the Social Studies took the lead in forming a 40-member National Commission on the Social Studies in the Schools. Collaborators with the NCSS in this endeavor are the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Given this lineup of key actors, the interests of history educators are certain to be well represented in the National Commission. But given the broad constituency of the NCSS, it also is certain that the full range of subjects in the social studies will be addressed. The National Commission probably will issue reports about the status of the social studies in elementary and secondary schools and how to improve the curriculum. The National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools is headquartered at 11 Dupont Circle, NW, Suite LL4, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-3362.